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NOTE ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

SUMMARY

A description of developments in 1991 in the field of international protection of refugees is contained in the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council (Document E/1992/59).

The present Note summarizes in general terms the principal challenges facing international protection today, illustrated through UNHCR operations having significant implications for the Office and as reflected in certain major findings and recommended approaches of the UNHCR Working Group on International Protection.

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NOTE ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The provision of international protection to refugees is one of the two basic functions of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It is a mandatory responsibility to be performed as a non-political, humanitarian and social activity. It is carried out in a framework comprising international refugee, human rights and humanitarian law, as well as guidelines for State behaviour agreed multilaterally. It depends for its effectiveness on cooperation between States, provided on the basis of principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing.

2. In the period since the forty-second session of the Executive Committee, UNHCR has continued to carry out its mandate of international protection of persons of concern to the Office. Its protection activities have traditionally focused on the refugee's needs from the moment of flight until the attainment of a durable solution. Basic protection principles promoted by the Office include the cardinal rights of asylum, non-refoulment and non-discrimination, which have remained at the centre of UNHCR's activities. While many States have continued to cooperate positively in granting asylum to refugees, situations persisted where refugees faced difficulties in relation to admission, access to procedures, refoulement, expulsion, physical security, detention and humane treatment. (For further details see UNHCR's Report to the Economic and Social Council (E/1992/59))

3. In addition to these concerns, major developments worldwide have created a new climate for the implementation of established refugee protection principles -- one which contains unprecedented opportunities as well as obstacles. With the end of the cold war era, an easing of tensions has resulted in the reduction of conflicts in some parts of the world as well as an increase in international cooperation which has opened new areas for action. However, these developments have been accompanied by preoccupying trends at the national level which include the break-up of nation-States, violence generated by resurgent nationalism or ethnic separatism, the increasing frequency of internal armed conflict -- with its consequent toll on the civilian population -- and political instability. Moreover, developments such as economic recession, the widening economic gap between industrialized and developing countries -- as well as between sectors of society -- environmental degradation and recurrent natural disasters have contributed to greater complexity in the character of migratory and refugee flows.

4. All of these developments have contributed to a "refugee problem" of such a size and complexity as to make significant demands on the effective implementation of protection principles. Large-scale and protracted refugee situations, combined with waning international solidarity, serve to compound socio-economic difficulties in many asylum countries. Against a background of expanding migratory movements, prevalent features of the refugee problem in many receiving countries include dramatically increased caseloads, a backlog

of claims, strained reception and integration facilities, as well as a serious backlash in domestic public opinion. The root causes for the refugee-related and migratory departures referred to above are usually complex and not easily addressed through preventive action in the short term. Moreover, other factors not only contribute to departure but present difficulties for return. These include poverty, systematic human rights violations, and overpopulation.

5. Given the differing characteristics of individual refugee problems, UNHCR has, as a matter of course, had to search for the most appropriate and effective manner in which to apply its mandate to each situation that it has encountered. There now exists an urgent need to explore new, complementary protection strategies in order to ensure that persons of concern and in need of protection receive it. These new strategies rest on activities principally in the fields of prevention and solutions to refugee problems and depend on an early clarification of the parameters of UNHCR's involvement, particularly inside the country of origin.

6. Against this background, the High Commissioner set up an internal UNHCR Working Group on International Protection. She requested that it analyze the major protection challenges confronting UNHCR and the legal bases for the Office's activities, as well as recommend a strategy for strengthening the international protection function in light of the current reality of refugee protection set out above.

7. The High Commissioner considers the findings and recommendations of the Working Group a proper and useful starting point from which to build protection firmly into the three-pronged strategy of emergency preparedness and response, voluntary repatriation and solutions through prevention, presented to the forty-second session of the Executive Committee as being at the heart of her approach to the refugee problem. The High Commissioner has also agreed that, where the need for further research, reflection or exploration was indicated, or is clear from the Working Group's report, it should be undertaken as a priority.

8. The purpose of this Note is to apprise the Executive Committee of the principal challenges facing international protection today, illustrated through UNHCR operations having significant implications for the Office and as reflected in certain major findings and recommended approaches of the Working Group. It is hoped that the views and suggestions of the Executive Committee on the directions recommended by the Working Group can contribute to the Office's implementing strategies.

II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

A. Overview

9. Over the past years, the Office has been involved in a number of situations and operations which have demanded traditional protection responses, combined with innovation in the face of dramatic challenges. In

the period under review, for example, UNHCR has continued in Asia to coordinate the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA). At the same time it has been carrying out the voluntary repatriation component of the United Nations peace-keeping operation in Cambodia; has sought to ensure the international protection of refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh, while encouraging the creation of conditions conducive to their voluntary and safe return; and has continued to attend to the needs of returnees and internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka. In Europe, the Office has been discharging its responsibilities as the lead agency for humanitarian assistance to the victims of conflict in the unprecendented operation being carried out by the United Nations in the republics of the former Yugoslavia. It has also been taking an active role in the development of new juridical and practical directions in asylum and protection in the rest of Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition to a number of other dramatic situations in Africa, UNHCR is actively involved in a wide range of humanitarian operations in the Horn, including operations carried out jointly with other United Nations organizations to address the common needs of mixed populations (including refugees) affected by conflict and man-made disasters, in some cases on both sides of national borders. In South Africa and Afghanistan, the Office is facilitating voluntary repatriation under circumstances which remain fragile. It has also contributed significantly to the efforts to assist the internally displaced persons and voluntary returnees in Iraq. In the Americas, the Office continued to play a leading role in the follow-up of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) - Concerted Plan of Action and was actively involved in attempts to resolve the Haitian asylum-seeker crisis.

10. UNHCR's involvement in such significant and multifaceted operations and situations has precipitated the Office into little-explored fields of activity and has underlined, to some extent, the need for supplementing traditional protection notions and approaches with protection activities in new areas.

11. Accordingly, the Working Group examined how best the Office could preserve the principles and values fundamental to international protection, while forging new responses which are innovative and practical, balancing humanitarian concerns with political realism, and States' interests with the rights and needs of refugees. To do this, it focused its deliberations on three general themes: asylum, prevention and solutions.

12. Its discussion of asylum required that the Working Group address the role of this institution as a protection mechanism measured against its role as a basis for a durable solution when it results in the integration, or settlement, of a refugee outside the country of origin. This discussion required an analysis of the varying interpretations of the parameters of asylum present in today's world, as well as an examination of the differing definitions applied in the grant of asylum. The analysis of UNHCR's potential and limitations in becoming involved in activities preventive of refugee flows took into account the Office's support for activities in the fields of preventive diplomacy, early-warning, peacemaking and peace-keeping, as well as questions directly related to UNHCR's function in the country of origin, i.e. as regards human rights monitoring and promotion, protection of internally

displaced persons, the advisability of safety zones and the effects of all these activities on the need to ensure continuing respect for the institution of asylum. The Working Group also focused its attention on UNHCR's possible catalytic role in an inter-agency context to encourage, where they relate to refugee problems, economic and social development initiatives and improvements in human rights situations.

13. Another major area for analysis was that of solutions, where both the need to find a durable solution to a refugee's problems and the State's concern to solve the problem of refugees generally were considered. In this vein, the Working Group focused much of its attention on when voluntary repatriation should be regarded as feasible and what criteria were necessary for the Office to decide to promote voluntary repatriation actively or simply facilitate or assist such an operation.

B. UNHCR'S Mandate and Competence

14. In assessing the legal bases for the Office's protection activities in the above-mentioned operations and situations, the Working Group measured them first against its understanding of UNHCR's mandate and competence. The High Commissioner's non-political mandate requires neutrality; but it was felt that this neutrality must be coupled with a thorough understanding of prevailing political and other realities. The evolution of UNHCR's role over the last forty years has demonstrated that the mandate is resilient enough to allow, or indeed require, adaptation by UNHCR to new, unprecedented challenges through new approaches, including in the areas of prevention and in-country protection. UNHCR's humanitarian expertise and experience has, in fact, been recognized by the General Assembly as an appropriate basis for undertaking a range of activities not normally viewed as being within the Office's mandate. The Office should continue to seek specific endorsement from the Secretary-General or General Assembly where these activities involve a significant commitment of human, financial and material resources.

15. The Working Group confirmed the widely recognized understanding that UNHCR's competence for refugees extends to persons forced to leave their countries due to armed conflict, or serious and generalized disorder or violence; these persons may or may not fall within the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) or its 1967 Protocol. From an examination of the common needs of the various groups for which UNHCR is competent, it is clear that, with protection at the core of UNHCR's mandate, displacement, coupled with the need for protection, is the basis of UNHCR's competence for these groups. The character of the displacement, together with the protection need, must also determine the content of UNHCR's involvement.

16. The Working Group considered that the same reasoning held true for persons displaced within their own country for refugee-like reasons. While the Office does not have any general competence for this group of persons, certain responsibilities may have to be assumed on their behalf, depending on

their protection and assistance needs. In this context, UNHCR should indicate its willingness to extend its humanitarian expertise to internally displaced persons, on a case-by-case basis, in response to requests from the Secretary-General or General Assembly.

17. The Working Group accepted that the Office should, as a general rule, have no involvement with persons who do not need protection. There may be situations, however, where UNHCR assistance in such cases could avert detrimental repercussions for persons of its concern. Such situations would include those where persons within the Office's competence are mixed inextricably with other needy groups, thereby making it practically and morally untenable to distinguish between the two. Assistance and a form of protection appropriate for the entire community, however, should be an inter-agency cooperative effort. Moreover, UNHCR's participation in such operations may also serve as a measure preventive of further displacement. Another example of such a situation would be one where claims to refugee status have been properly rejected by the competent authorities and the claimants are deemed by UNHCR not to fall within the Office's competence, but their stay in the country where asylum was sought could have a detrimental effect on the institution of asylum or refugee protection. UNHCR could, exceptionally, play a limited supportive role here to facilitate return, as long as this role does not conflict with its humanitarian mandate and the countries of origin involved agree to take back the persons concerned.

18. The Working Group set its examination of UNHCR's mandate and competence in a framework of basic human rights and refugee law protection principles. It concluded that the framework for UNHCR's activities must remain the fundamental protection principles; cardinal among them being the principle of non-refoulement. Moreover, there should be no ambiguity as to the scope of this basic protection.

C. Asylum

19. Having examined the framework for UNHCR's protection role as well as the character and scope of its protection mandate, the Working Group examined today's major protection challenges and UNHCR's response to them. One main challenge for the Office is to determine and consolidate the proper role of asylum in its overall protection response. Asylum is a protection mechanism which can also lead to the solution of local integration or resettlement. In this regard, the Working Group reaffirmed that asylum is a fundamental principle of refugee protection and, at the same time, a practical, solution-oriented response to a humanitarian problem. UNHCR must continue to promote the right of all refugees to seek and enjoy asylum, at least on a temporary basis, and until a solution can be found. The 1951 Convention, 1967 Protocol and regional refugee instruments remain central in defining standards for refugee protection in countries of asylum. In the case of large-scale influx, regard should be had for the guidelines set out in an Executive Committee conclusion on the protection of asylum-seekers, to ensure basic standards of humanitarian treatment in such situations (No. 22 (XXXII)). These standards should be implemented with the specific needs of vulnerable groups -- notably women and children -- in mind.

20. Starting from this position, and drawing on the lessons of UNHCR participation in major operations and situations such as the ones referred to earlier, the Working Group accepted that, while many States still cooperate very positively in granting asylum to refugees, local integration in the receiving country seems no longer to be a feasible solution in many situations. This is particularly the case in most mass-influx situations.

21. Accordingly, variable approaches are being pursued with greater frequency in order to implement a more vigorous promotion of voluntary repatriation and develop such concepts as State responsibility, prevention -- including in-country protection -- and temporary protection. UNHCR must adjust to this reality in a manner which should be reflected across the spectrum of its activities, including its promotion, training, information and media activities, the advisory services it offers and its participation in regional arrangements for strengthening refugee protection.

22. In its participation in such regional arrangements, UNHCR should continue to take the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol as the starting point, but seek also to build variable approaches for groups other than 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol refugees which accord with basic humanitarian standards and which could include temporary protection, as well as definitions and regimes in existing regional instruments. Regarding the specific issue of temporary protection, the Working Group considered that, as its point of departure, the Office must require for the persons of its concern minimum standards of protection against discrimination, refoulement and expulsion as well as guarantees of basic standards of humane treatment and other fundamental human rights, such as the right to family unity.

23. As a result of recent events involving the massive flow of refugees from the former Yugoslavia, the notion of temporary protection is advocated as a possible alternative to established asylum procedures. The main reason for this is the concerted international efforts being taken to reach a political resolution. Consequently, UNHCR is currently consulting with concerned Governments in an effort to examine certain questions of principle as well as technical issues arising from the application of this concept.

24. The Working Group recognized that, in some parts of the world, the notion of temporary protection is being linked to the developing concept of safe return. The Working Group felt that, as safety on return could be difficult to verify in practice, well-defined, objective criteria would have to be set for determining that danger no longer exists before obligatory return could be implemented. It was also felt that the time was not yet appropriate for UNHCR to promote new universal instruments outside the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol for the protection of refugees by States. While this option could be explored further, the Office should, nevertheless, work actively to develop regional protection possibilities and, where feasible, regional solutions for refugees, which should neither be at the expense of, nor a substitute for, the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol or existing regional instruments. Assured adequate resources, international solidarity and burden-sharing would be necessary for these regional solutions to be implemented.

25. Proper procedures to ensure the availability of asylum are as important as the conceptual basis upon which the asylum is granted. The Working Group had no doubt that, within the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol framework, UNHCR should continue to promote effective and expeditious status determination procedures, assured access to these procedures and acceptance by States of the need to consider claims put to them. At the same time, clear and intentional abuse of refugee status determination procedures should be actively discouraged. The Working Group agreed that, in mass-influx situations where individual refugee status determination procedures under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol prove logistically unworkable, States should opt for determinations on a group basis as the most practical response to the situation. Under these circumstances, the Office should undertake consultations with the authorities concerned on an appropriate protection regime and solution for such groups.

D. UNHCR'S Role in the Country of Origin: Prevention

26. In accepting that asylum remains an essential protection mechanism, but not always the appropriate long-term solution, the Working Group recognized the need to give greater content to a role for UNHCR vis-à-vis countries of origin, including in the area of prevention. Here, the challenge is to develop a balanced and effective refugee policy which includes new options on prevention, while respecting the basic principles and concerns of protection. The Working Group considered prevention to be an umbrella term covering activities both to attenuate causes of departure and to reduce or contain cross-border movements or internal displacements. Prevention is not, however, a substitute for asylum; the right to seek and enjoy asylum, therefore, must continue to be upheld. In terms of specific activities which the Office should undertake in the area of prevention, particularly as a catalyst, it was agreed that early-warning, preventive diplomacy, human rights promotion, economic and social development and protection of internally displaced persons were all areas appropriate for specific UNHCR initiatives. Inter-agency cooperation in this area is particularly important for UNHCR, taking into account the complementarity of mandates and the expertise of relevant organizations, as well as the need for coordination of approaches.

27. The Working Group agreed that UNHCR's presence in refugees' country of origin is, in principle, always of crucial importance to any prevention and solution-oriented activities. Such a presence would allow UNHCR to work to create conditions conducive to repatriation as well as to undertake preventive work through training, promotion and advisory services and, as appropriate and feasible, to develop in-country protection possibilities.

1. Indirect Prevention

28. As regards its early-warning capacity, UNHCR's current reporting system and organizational structure both need to be assessed with a view to improving the collection, analysis and channeling by UNHCR of information on potential

refugee flows and internal displacement. In addition, the Office must continue to promote the development within the United Nations system of an appropriate early-warning mechanism for refugee flows.

29. The Working Group felt that UNHCR should continue to play a strong role -- which is both catalytic and complementary -- of preventive diplomacy by taking initiatives to promote humanitarian action, as well as by supporting the peacemaking and peace-keeping activities of the United Nations Secretary-General. UNHCR should play such a role particularly where such efforts are used to safeguard the delivery of international protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons and to find solutions to their plight. In this connection, close liaison with the political, security and humanitarian arms of the United Nations Secretariat should be developed from the early stages of an evolving conflict. At the same time, the Working Group considered that UNHCR's activities must retain their protection and solutions orientation as well as their humanitarian, non-political character, while the High Commissioner's right to take her own initiatives to prevent refugee flows, or find solutions to them, must not be compromised.

30. It was also agreed that there are a number of preventive measures in the areas of human rights promotion which could usefully be undertaken by the High Commissioner in the country of origin. Certain of these were identified in the High Commissioner's statement to the forty-eighth Session of the Commission on Human Rights, and include human rights monitoring, providing advisory services, promoting regional structures for protecting the rights of vulnerable groups, as well as encouraging tolerance for diversity and respect for human rights. The Working Group recognized that UNHCR is, in fact, already working in a number of refugee-related situations, often together with other United Nations bodies, to improve respect for human rights, and noted the need for UNHCR to cooperate actively with efforts under way to promote a United Nations strategy to improve protection of the human rights of the internally displaced.

31. In the field of economic and social development, the Working Group also felt that the High Commissioner should actively seek to ensure that the refugee issue is placed on the agenda of international and regional development agencies and lending institutions. In addition, ongoing activities within the inter-agency framework to enhance understanding of the relationship between migration, refugee flows and development and environmental issues should be encouraged.

2. Direct Prevention

32. "Direct prevention", notably the undertaking of specific activities inside countries of origin so that people do not feel compelled to cross borders in search of protection, was also examined by the Working Group. Such in-country protection might involve international monitoring of basic human rights and the physical safety of internally displaced persons, with follow-up action as appropriate. The creation of safety zones inside countries of origin should be approached with caution, but would also benefit from further

study in order to clarify the human rights and refugee protection principles and the national sovereignty issues involved, the modalities for ensuring security and an appropriate multilateral safety net, as well as methods for promoting durable solutions in such a framework.

33. UNHCR's participation in a context of internal displacement should only be considered by the Office where baseline criteria are met. Prior to initiating or accepting a request for involvement, UNHCR should ascertain that: the option of asylum remains open; the Office is given full access, security and other conditions which allow it to operate; the situation calls for UNHCR's particular expertise; and the Office's involvement is based on the consent of all parties involved, and enjoys the political support of the international community. Adequate special funds would also have to be available. Moreover, the presence of other United Nations agencies, cooperating in a multilateral effort, would be an influential consideration. Finally, the Office's involvement would have to be solution-oriented and fully consistent with its humanitarian and non-political character which, as one practical consequence, would mean that UNHCR must actively avoid and, under no circumstances condone, forcible relocation, or other practices violating basic human rights. Depending on the request received and the prevailing conditions, the Office should also be prepared to assume an appropriate lead role in the return of the internally displaced to their places of habitual residence.

34. The timing for the phasing-out of UNHCR's presence is critical to the effective performance of such in-country responsibilities. Clear criteria need to be developed in this regard to avoid open-ended involvement. The Office should not be drawn into serving as a human rights monitor for the population in general, i.e. beyond those protection activities related to the problem of displacement.

E. Solutions

35. While prevention is accepted by most as preferable to having to resolve situations after they have developed, its limitations are also appreciated. The Working Group, therefore, examined certain aspects of current solutions to refugee problems with particular protection implications. Clearly, solutions and protection are closely interrelated endeavours, with solutions being the goal of protection, and protection principles, of necessity, guiding the process towards solutions. Solutions need, in this sense, to be solidly based on human rights, as well as on recognition and acceptance by States -- particularly countries of origin -- of their respective responsibilities. In saying this, it needs also to be acknowledged that solutions to refugee problems cannot be seen in isolation from their underlying political and socio-economic causes.

1. Voluntary Repatriation

36. The Working Group paid particular attention to the durable solution of voluntary repatriation, which is being tested, both in terms of its principles and practice, by the realities existing in many countries to which refugees are returning. These realities include fragile security situations, the presence of land-mines and the lack, or virtual devastation, of economic and social infrastructures. Voluntary repatriation was reaffirmed by the Working Group as the preferred durable solution, where feasible, with the other durable solutions of local integration or resettlement remaining relevant where voluntary repatriation was impossible. UNHCR has a responsibility to work to make the voluntary repatriation solution feasible and, accordingly, the Office should actively seek to create conditions conducive to safe and voluntary return from the outset of all refugee problems, even in an emergency.

37. While UNHCR should promote, or encourage, voluntary repatriation only when conditions allow it to do so, the Office, nevertheless, has a responsibility to facilitate, or assist, the return of individuals whenever they so choose, as long as they are fully aware of any dangers upon return and their right to re-entry is recognized by the country of origin. Its role as a facilitator should include, wherever possible, protection and assistance activities in countries of origin on behalf of voluntary returnees.

38. Criteria for promotion and organization of large-scale repatriation must balance the protection needs of refugees against the political imperative towards resolving refugee problems. The prevailing security situation in the country of origin, existing guarantees or assurances of safety on return, access arrangements and monitoring possibilities for UNHCR, the adequacy of reception arrangements and the voluntariness of returns, are all relevant considerations in determining the appropriateness of the voluntary repatriation solution in any refugee situation. In addition, the quantity and reliability of the information available to refugees on conditions in the country of origin will assist UNHCR in its choice whether to promote repatriation. Finally, reintegration possibilities for voluntary returnees in the country of origin can determine the durability of the solution of repatriation and, as such, are a valid focus of UNHCR's protection responsibilities in voluntary repatriation operations.

2. Regional Concerted Arrangements

39. The Working Group was convinced that the realization of a solution in a growing number of refugee situations today is most likely where the solution is made an integral part of a "package" which strikes a humane balance between the interests of affected States and the legal rights, as well as humanitarian needs, of the individuals concerned.

40. The "package" approach to certain regional situations was encouraged by the Working Group, which recommended that the Office play a creative and positive role, together with States, and, as appropriate, other multilateral

organizations, in devising such flexible and innovative comprehensive responses when a situation so requires. Respect for the principles of non-refoulement, temporary asylum, minimum standards of treatment in countries of asylum, guarantees or assurances of safety on return and UNHCR monitoring in the country of origin, as well as assistance for return and reintegration, would normally be part of any package. Other arrangements are likely to include measures directed against causes of flight -- e.g. efforts to promote and protect human rights in countries of origin -- and activities to address the migratory component of a mixed refugee/migrant outflow. The Working Group also recognized the need to examine under what conditions return, in a broader sense, might be made integral to a combination of arrangements together constituting a "package" solution. Where return is part of a "package", certain considerations additional to, or somewhat different from, those relating to voluntary repatriation might have to be considered. In particular, the relative weights of voluntariness of return and guarantees of safety upon return may need to be measured one against the other. The Working Group agreed, however, that this last question requires further study.

III. COOPERATION FOR PROTECTION

41. New directions or approaches can only be pursued by UNHCR as part of a cooperative effort involving Governments, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which draws on the support of academic institutions, the media and other influential segments of national communities.

42. UNHCR also relies strongly on its partnership with intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies for the effective delivery of protection. As this reliance can only increase, the Office is committed to promoting better cooperation in order to enhance complementarity and improve effectiveness in the provision of protection. In the context of prevention, UNHCR is particularly enjoined to develop a joint strategy with human rights bodies, notably the Centre for Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Commission and, on a country-by-country basis, human rights missions established by the Security Council and reporting to the Secretary-General. At the regional level, UNHCR will also explore actively the possibilities for establishing additional legal and practical arrangements with regional and sub-regional institutions so as to develop, harmonize and promote refugee law and protection principles, as well as facilitate prevention and solutions at the national and regional levels. At the national level, the promotion of national refugee bodies composed of NGOs, community leaders, senior Government representatives and other influential personalities would greatly contribute to sensitizing the national environment on refugee protection policies and principles.

43. Links with academic institutions can be important for UNHCR in research terms, but also for exchange of ideas and promotion of refugee law teaching. Accordingly, the Office will be encouraging greater collaboration and exchange with academic institutions. At the same time, in view of the evolving refugee situation and the new challenges faced by UNHCR, the capacity of the Office for research, notably on protection issues, needs to be strengthened.

44. Cooperation with and through the media is potentially a very valuable protection tool. The Office is firmly committed to making public information a more integral part of protection strategies, incorporating a role for protection advocacy bodies, parliamentarians, teachers, journalists and other opinion-makers. Adequate resources need, however, to be allocated for further development of such public information activities.

45. Sufficient resources are also fundamental to ensuring the availability to the Office of high-quality, up-to-date and reliable information. Electronic information technology is important for speedy access to accurate information. The particular importance of data bases to UNHCR, to Governments and to NGOs, as a basis for timely and responsible decision-making, therefore, is widely recognized. Against this background, UNHCR's cooperation in information exchange with Governments, NGOs, and refugee and human rights documentation networks will be further strengthened.

IV. CONCLUSION

46. The Office will work over the coming months to promote a strong intergovernmental and inter-agency framework for following up on the Working Group's recommendations. International consensus on protection guidelines which constructively respond to refugee needs remains a fundamental element in refugee protection, and the Executive Committee's role in this regard is crucial.

47. The preceding views and recommended approaches are submitted to the Executive Committee at this time in the firm belief that the strengthening of protection cannot be achieved without committed international support and participation. It is hoped that discussion in this Committee will contribute to galvanizing action at the international level towards a dynamic, operational and solution-oriented approach to protection in the years to come.